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ABSTRACT

The physical and emotional manifestations of burnout are described. A five-phase model is outlined for preventing extensive stress leading to teacher burnout. Phase One is predicated upon the notion that a professional cannot manage stress without the ability to identify it. Descriptions are given of the signs of physiological, psychological, and behavioral stress. Phase Two involves an analysis of the sources of stress. Lists are provided of common stressors within the family environment and the professional workplace. The cognitive and physical factors that emerge as internal sources of stress and potential burnout are discussed. The cognitive factors concern the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the activating events in one's life and the various experiences in day-to-day living. The physical stressors have the most harmful long range effects on the human body. The third phase of the preventive model offers suggestions on how to develop a stress management plan. This includes relaxation exercises, cognitive restructuring, health habit changes, situational changes, time management, and obtaining social support or help from others. Phases Four and Five of the model consist of implementation of the stress management plan and evaluation of its effectiveness. (JD)

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THE PREVENTION OF TEACHER BURNOUT THROUGH STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Doris B. Matthews

Definition of Burnout

Because of the lack of discipline, violence, negative student attitudes toward learning, the inability to succeed in educating every child, mainstreaming nightmares, administration hassles, and the lack of input in the decision-making process, many teachers are experiencing a syndrome known as "teacher burnout." A burnout is someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward. The condition exists when a person is attempting to perform a job by merely going through the motions. The individual continues to function, and more than likely still maintains the skills which enabled him/her to originally perform the job, gain employment, and even meet certification requirements, but because of burnout lacks enthusiasm and receives no personal satisfaction.

Teachers are particularly prone to burnout because many young people enter the profession expecting to be able to make an impact on all the lives with whom they deal. They envision turning wasted lives into productive ones and sending educated students into the world. Unfortunately, teachers experience failure as some of the students they try to help surround themselves with impenetrable walls.

When the expectation level of a teacher is dramatically opposed to reality and he/she persists in trying to reach that expectation, burnout is on the way. Deep inside, friction is building up, the

inevitable result of which will be a depletion of the individual's resources, an attrition to his/her vitality, energy, and ability to function.

Definition of Stress

Hans Selye (1950) described stress in terms of the "general adaptation syndrome." The "general adaptation syndrome" is divided into three stages: (1) the alarm reaction, (2) the resistance stage, and (3) exhaustion. The alarm reaction entails bodily changes for quick action and is associated with emotions. In the resistance stage the body recovers from the initial outburst of emotion and attempts to endure the emotion-producing situation as well as possible. The person's attempt to endure emotion places relatively high degrees of strain on his/her body's psychological resources. If the stress is overwhelming and the individual is unable to cope with or manage the stress, he/she enters the third stage, exhaustion. In the exhaustion stage the person has exhausted the internal resources for managing stress and new stressors which arose during the resistance phase and are still present during exhaustion. Complete exhaustion is death.

Burnout occurs during the "twilight zone" between the resistance stage and the initial period of exhaustion. The alarm signs may be viewed as an attempt by the body to protect itself from stressor or stressors.

Some common alarm signs or stress-related disorders which imply burnout are: (1) heart attacks, (2) strokes, (3) gastro-intestinal dysfunctions, (4) cardiovascular disease, (5) increased susceptability to infectious diseases, (6) ulcers, (7) skin disorders, (8) backaches, (9) more rapid aging, (10) sexual dysfunctions, (11) accident proneness, (12) hypertension, (13)

insomnia, (14) muscle pains, (15) severe headaches, (16) prolonged fatigue, (17) psychoneurotic behavior, (18) psychiatric disorders, (19) drug abuse, (20) alcoholism, (21) difficulty in concentrating and attending to the task at hand, (22) increased irritability and argumentativeness, (23) increased opposition to new ideas, (24) cynicism about one's work, and (25) marital difficulties.

Managing Stress

Although the workplace for teachers presents many frustrations, each teacher has the power within him/herself to learn coping behavior. To prevent extensive stress leading to burnout a five phase model is recommended. The phases are (1) identification of stressful signs, (2) analysis of the sources of stress, (3) the development of a stress management plan, (4) implementation of the plan and (5) evaluation.

Phase I - Identification of Stressful Signs

Phase I is predicated upon the notion that a professional cannot manage stress unless he or she can identify it. Identification of stress requires one to know the indications of stress and potential burnout. The signs of stress can be divided into physiological, psychological, and behavioral manifestations (Everly and Girdano, 1980). Physiological signs include such effects as (1) increased heart rate, (2) increased blood pressure, (3) increased sweating, (4) muscular trembling or tension, and (5) increased adrenalin and noradrenalin secretions. Signs of psychological stressors are (1) lower intellectual functioning, (2) poorer verbal communications, (3) resentment of supervisory personnel, (4) suspicion of supervisory personnel, (5) anger, (6) increased emotional reactiveness, and (7) confusion or anxiety. Evidences of behavioral stressors are (1) decreased performance

levels, (2) increased alcohol and drug abuse, (3) increased error rate, and (4) sabotage.

Phase II - Analysis of the Sources of Stress

The analysis of the sources of stress addresses the fact that one cannot manage stress unless one knows its source or sources. For the purposes of stress management and the prevention of burnout the external and internal environments that interact within the individual professional are seen as the sources of stressors.

Within the external environment some common sources of stress and potential burnout are the family and the professional workplace. Some common stressors within the family are: (1) marital problems, (2) parenting problems, (3) changes in family residence, (4) family disorganization, (5) family members leaving home, (6) death of a family member, (7) health problems, and (8) financial problems. Common stressors within the professional workplace are: (1) beginning a new job, (2) upward professional/work mobility, (3) relocation, (4) retirement, (5) professional/work overload, (6) inactivity and boredom of work, (7) role and status ambiguity/ uncertainty, (8) lack of job security, (9) overspecialization, (10) bureaucracy, (11) stifled communication, (12) poor interpersonal relations with authority figures, colleagues, subordinates, and clients, (13) political and manipulative machinations in the work enviornment, (14) discrimination, and (15) technological change.

Internal sources of stress and potential burnout from which stressors emerge include cognitive and physical factors.

Cognitive factors are focused in the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and perceptions one has concerning the activating events in one's

life and the various experiences one undergoes in day-to-day living. Internal messages or self-talk that one tells him/herself such as negative self statements and irrational ideas give rise to self-defeating behavior, therefore generate stress and accelerate professional burnout. Albert Ellis and Robert A. Harper (1975) have catalogued countless variations of the "must's," and "If only's" of wishful and self-punishing thinking in an analysis that shows how faulty thinking keeps people from facing reality. Here are some of these ideas as they apply to burnout in the teaching profession:

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for a teacher to be loved or appreciated by every student.
2. The idea that one must always enjoy the favor of one's supervisor.
3. The idea that one must be thoroughly competent and successful in doing one's job if one is to consider oneself worthwhile.
4. The idea that anyone who disagrees with one's own ideas and methods is "bad" and becomes an opponent to be scorned, rejected, or anathematized.
5. The idea that one should become very upset over the child's problems and failings.
6. The idea that it is awful and catastrophic when the individual and the institution do not behave as one would like them to.
7. The idea that one's unhappiness is caused by the students or the institution and that one has little or no ability to control one's emotional reactions.
8. The idea that until students and the institution straighten themselves out and do what is right one has no responsibility to do what is right oneself.
9. The idea that there is invariably a right, precise, and perfect solution to human problems and that it is catastrophic if that solution is not found.
10. The idea that one can achieve maximum human happiness by inertia and inaction or by passively and uncommittedly enjoying onself. Each of these irrational ideas is a source of stress, hence each is a stressor that accelerates teacher burnout.

The physical sources of stress are focused in the manner in which one takes care of his/her body and in the degree to which one rationally and actively lives a healthy life. It should be noted that physical stressors can have deleterious psychological consequences as well as physical results. Excessive use of tobacco and alcohol, drug abuse, poor or unbalanced diet, lack of exercise, sleep disturbance, and inappropriate use of medication contribute to stress and are therefore stressors that can hasten occupational burnout.

The stressors identified immediately above have short-range as well as long-term consequences. The medical problems that are associated with these stressors can in the long-run, if unresolved or inadequately managed, result in death. The physical stressors, then, are the most deleterious long-range effects that one must confront.

Behavioral indications of stress and potential occupational burnout include ineffective resistance to stressful stimuli. These indications are observable by others. Among these observable or objective signs of stress are interpersonal indications, physical risk behavior, and work-related manifestations. Interpersonal indications include such behaviors as an increased in number and intensity of arguments with family members, friends, and colleagues, increased irritability demonstrated in verbally and physically agressive behavior, impatience with others, aggression turned in upon the self expressed through overworking, carelessness, procrastination, and hyperactivity and excessive emotionality such as inappropriate laughing, crying, and sighing. Physical risk behaviors that can indicate stress and therefore potential burnout include increased alcohol consumption, smoking, over- or undereating,

increased use of medications such as analgesics, "downers," and "uppers," changes in sleeping habits, and a decrease in exercise or a considerable increase/decrease in physical activity. Work-related stress and potential burnout signs are increased absenteeism and tardiness, decreased work performance or professional competence and impaired work productivity, creativity, and dependability.

It should be emphasized that the behavioral manifestations identified immediately above do not always and unequivocally indicate stress, unless they occur repeatedly, and increase in intensity and frequency in the relative absence of incapacitating physical illness.

Phase III - Development of a Stress Management Plan

After signs of stress and potential burnout have been identified and the source or sources of the stressor or stressors determined, the individual is ready to move to a management plan. An individual's particular stress management plan can utilize one or more of the effective techniques that follow: (1) relaxation exercises, (2) cognitive restructuring, (3) health habit changes, (4) situational changes, (5) time management, and (6) obtaining social support or help from others.

One important technique in managing stress and therefore reducing the probability of occupational burnout is acquiring skill in eliciting the "relaxation response," a mechanism that nature has provided an individual to help one manage or resist inevitable stress. There are several methods such as meditation, autogenic relaxation, biofeedback-aided relaxation, and neuromuscular relaxation. One of the easiest programs for personal development is prescribed by Herbert Benson (1975). The focus is on muscle relaxation. It can be applied at home, in the teacher's lounge, or

in the office. The steps are as follows:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close the eyes.
3. Beginning at the head and progressing down to the feet, tense and then relax all of the muscles.
4. Breathe through the nose deeply, becoming aware of the breathing. Inhale slowly and then exhale slowly. Do this for 10 to 15 minutes.
5. When finished, one should sit quietly for several minutes, first with the eyes closed and later with the eyes opened.
6. This technique should be practiced once or twice daily but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with eliciting the relaxation response.

It is desirable to know the signs of the relaxation response as well as the signs of stress. Relaxation includes the following manifestations: (1) decreases in respiration rate, heart rate, muscle tension, metabolism, (2) changes in blood chemistry and changes in blood flow--away from the skeletal muscles--resulting in a sense of warmth in the hands and feet, and (3) increased digestion.

Development of the ability to relax has short-range and long-term consequences. In the short term, relaxation increases one's ability to manage current stress, generates feelings of pleasantness and well-being, and frequently generates increased creativity and innovativeness. Long-range consequences of continued use of relaxation are focused in increased probability of obviating burnout.

Of the several approaches to cognitive restructuring, one of the most effective elementary discussions is presented by Howard S. Young (1974) in the book, A Rational Counseling Primer. He makes use of an A-B-C-D-E Model. A refers to activating events or experiences; B refers to beliefs, ideas, thoughts about A; C is

the consequence (emotional reaction) that stems not from A but from B about A; D refers to the necessity to dispute, debate, question, challenge one's irrational beliefs (B); and E refers to the effects of disputing or debating or questioning or challenging one's irrational beliefs. D and E are the heart or core of the Ellisonian classic approach to cognitive restructuring.

Another stress management plan is changing health habits. Changing one's health habits generally involve three processes. First, one can maintain those health-producing habitual behaviors that he/she has acquired; second, one can decrease those harm producing habits such as reducing caloric and alcohol intake; and third, one can increase "good" health habits such as eating a balanced diet or getting an adequate degree of physical exercise.

Simply intending to change one's health habits is inadequate in effecting change. Change can be facilitated by four activities: (1) recording the frequency of the occurrence of the habit, (2) getting realistic attainable behavioral goals, (3) reinforcing the occurrence of the new behavior by rewarding, and (4) evaluating and remaking the goals if they proved too demanding.

Another aspect of the management plan is situational changes. Changes in the situation can take a variety of forms. One way is to change directly by relocating to a more desirable work situation, thereby reducing the situational stressors. Another kind of change is to attempt a restructuring of the psychological climate of the work situation through such activities as clarification of job functions and requirements, more delegation of tasks to others, a transfer to another school within the district, and learning to say "no" when you mean "no" and "yes" when you mean "yes."

In many instances, interpersonal situational difficulties can be altered by appropriate and creative assertive (not aggressive) behavior. Assertiveness is the honest, straightforward expression of one's genuine, authentic needs and feelings in ways that do not contravene the rights of others. Creative assertion includes several components; namely, positive or empathic statements; a clear, unambiguous, brief statement of the problem at the core of the conflict; and a statement of alternative actions that can lead to conflict resolution.

Time management, the next stress management plan, refers to the processes of actively structuring one's time in ways that facilitate the reduction of stress and increase the probability that personal and professional goals are attained. One can manage time by structuring one's own activities in ways that reduce the number of stressors that have to be confronted and by organizing one's day so there is time to accomplish the essentials in day-to-day activities. There are several warnings in scheduling the time in one's day. One is not to overload the schedule; overloading dooms one to failure. Another reminder is to schedule time for tasks that produce personal enjoyment. The third one is to follow conscientiously the schedule.

Obtaining social support is an effective but often overlooked mechanism for stress management. Discussion of stressors with family and friends often facilitates one's discovering more effective means of stress management.

The help of other professionals is often a desirable avenue to stress management. Counseling; psychotherapy; legal, economic, medical, and religious advice are often indicated as stress management techniques of both preventive and curative kinds.

In developing a stress management plan it is essential that one does not perseverate by following a habitual response that may or may not be effective. One way of eluding perseveration is the generation of several alternative stress reducing plans.

From among the various alternatives, it is necessary that at least one of them be selected for implementation. Selection of alternatives involves evaluation of all the alternatives that have been identified. There are at least three criteria against which each alternative must be judged. These are:

1. The desirable and undesirable short-term consequences that are likely to emerge if the alternative is selected.

2. The feasibility of each alternative. Feasibility takes into consideration the individual's life-style, the likely degree of support from significant others and the likelihood of positive reinforcement from those societal elements that the individual most strongly cathects.

3. The long-term probable effects of each alternative. The alternative that meets the criteria to the greatest degree is then selected as the first-order stress management plan, while the "runner-up" alternative becomes the "back-up" plan.

Phase IV - Implementation

The next step in the model is naturally implementation. It is a fact that unless a plan is implemented, it is not a plan at all but only something that might have been. Since one learns only what one does, action is a *sine qua non* if stress is to be managed rather than mismanaged.

Phase V - Evaluation

Evaluation of the plan entails a determination of the degree to which resistance to stress has been increased by the activities implicit in the stress management plan. If physiological, psychological, and behavioral signs of stress have decreased, the plan is effective. If these signs remain unchanged or increase,

evaluation of the plan at each stage is required. The original plan as modified through the evaluation process or the back-up plan or a combination of the two is then implemented.

Summary and Conclusion

Burnout in the teaching profession is a multidimensional problem related to tension and stress caused by a number of personal and workplace related factors. How stressfully one reacts to the environment is determined, to a large extent, by attitudes, values, personality, emotional development, and the ability to alter the influence of the environment through such factors as relaxation, cognitive restructuring, health habits, situational changes, time management, and a social support system.

The teaching profession is more prone toward burnout than many of the other occupations, but a closer look into work-related stress reveals that the occupation is not so inherently stressful that much of the stress cannot be exorcized. No individual is so out of control that he/she cannot reduce personal stress and/or potential burnout. The ability to do so lies within the individual. First, he/she must possess the knowledge of the techniques and secondly, and most importantly, he/she must put the knowledge into practice.

Recognition of the signs of burnout and application of preventive and intervention techniques can calculate in conservation of teacher power.

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